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PAGE 001

NC 9130328

TOR: 281640Z JUL 82

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 RUEHBE/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE 0396
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EXDIS

E.O. 12065: RDS-1 7/28/02 (LEWIS, SAMUEL W.) OR-M
 TAGS: MOPS, IS, SY
 SUBJECT: ISRAELI CONCERN SYRIA MAY BE PREPARING
 TO USE SCUD MISSILES

REFS: (A) TEL AVIV 11401, (B) TEL AVIV 11413

1. SECRET - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. DAO WAS CALLED TO ISRAELI DEFENSE MINISTRY
 EARLIER TODAY TO HEAR REPORT THAT IDF HAS
 IDENTIFIED INDICATIONS THAT THE SYRIANS ARE
 TAKING STEPS TO INCREASE THE LAUNCH READINESS

SECRET

State Dept. review completed

1

SECRET

STATE

82 9130328

SSZ

PAGE 002
TOR: 281640Z JUL 82

NC 9130328

OF SCUD SURFACE TO SURFACE MISSILES (REF A). INDICATORS THAT THE ISRAELIS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT INCLUDE MOVEMENT OF SCUD MISSILE UNITS TO PERMANENT SITE, GATHERING OF METEOROLOGICAL DATA NECESSARY FOR LAUNCHING, AND INCREASED UNIT TRAINING. IN THE COURSE OF THEIR PRESENTATION, ISRAELIS SUGGESTED THAT, WITHOUT REVEALING THE NATURE OR SOURCE OF ITS INFORMATION, THE U.S. MIGHT STRESS TO THE SYRIANS THAT THE ISRAELIS HAVE INTERPRETED THE SYRIAN STATEMENT OF THIS WEEKEND ON THE USE OF NEW WEAPONS TO INCLUDE SURFACE TO SURFACE MISSILES, AND THAT ISRAEL WOULD VIEW INDICATIONS OF PREPARATION TO USE SUCH WEAPONS VERY GRAVELY. FURTHER DAO REPORT CONTAINING DETAILS WILL FOLLOW SEPTEL.

3. AS REPORTED REF B, DEFENSE MINISTER SHARON TOLD PHIL HABIB AND ME LAST NIGHT THAT IF THE SYRIANS AGAIN SHOOT AT THEIR RECONNAISSANCE FLIGHTS FROM ACROSS THE BORDER, THEY WILL ATTACK THE OFFENDING MISSILE SITES, EVEN IF THEY ARE ON THE SYRIAN SIDE OF THE BORDER. OBVIOUSLY, THE ISRAELIS HAVE THEIR BLOOD UP WITH REGARD TO THE QUESTION OF ATTACKS ON ISRAELIS OR ISRAEL FROM THE SYRIAN SIDE OF THE BORDER. THE REPORTS AND INTERPRETATION WHICH SUGGEST THAT THE SYRIANS ARE INCREASING THE READINESS LEVEL OF SCUD MISSILES WILL ONLY FURTHER INCREASE THE TENSION LEVEL AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT. WITH RESPECT TO THIS PARTICULAR WEAPON, THE ISRAELIS AND BEGIN IN PARTICULAR WILL BE MORE THAN USUALLY PRONE TO "BE ON THE SAFE SIDE," BY LAUNCHING PREEMPTIVE ATTACKS.

4. WE URGE THAT AN ALL-SOURCE ANALYSIS OF CURRENT SYRIAN CAPABILITIES AND INTENTIONS REGARDING SCUD MISSILES BE MADE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. IT WILL BE CRUCIAL FOR US TO BE ABLE TO SHARE WITH THE ISRAELIS OUR JUDGMENTS ON THE SITUATION.

SECRET

1

SECRET

STATE

82 9130328 SSZ

PAGE 003
TOR: 281640Z JUL 82

NC 9130328

5. WE ALSO BELIEVE DEPARTMENT SHOULD INSTRUCT
AMBASSADOR PAGANELLI TO RAISE ISSUE WITH SYRIANS
IMMEDIATELY, URGING THAT THEY TAKE NO STEPS
WHICH COULD BE INTERPRETED BY THE ISRAELIS TO
IMPLY THAT THEY ARE CONSIDERING USE OF SAM'S AGAINST
ISRAEL. (WE ASSUME THAT THE DEPARTMENT HAS
ALREADY INSTRUCTED EMBASSY DAMASCUS TO RAISE
THE SAM ISSUE WITH THE SYRIANS.)

6. MINIMIZE DAMASCUS AND BEIRUT CONSIDERED. LEWIS

END OF MESSAGE

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